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Reporters, Richard Allen wants to help you—or else. STAT

MUSCLING THE MEDIA

BY CHUCK LANE

A COUPLE of months ago, William D. Rogers, a partner in the prestigious Washington law firm of Arnold & Porter, sent a large package to every major newspaper, magazine, and TV network in America. In an accompanying letter he put the recipients "on notice" that "incorrect, incomplete or misleading references" to his client, Richard V. Allen, will be "actionable at law" (that is, subject to a libel suit). Rogers attached a sheaf of clippings illustrating what Allen does not wish to read about himself. The clippings said, in effect, that Allen had taken a \$1,000 bribe while serving as National Security Adviser to President Reagan in 1981 and that he was forced to resign because of it. The package also contained a copy of a Justice Department report saying that there wasn't enough evidence against Allen to warrant prosecution, and letters of apology Allen had extracted from journalists (including such luminaries as Joseph Kraft and Anthony Lewis) who had written about the charge without mentioning the Justice Department report.

Allen dismisses the idea that he and his lawyer are trying to bully the press. "That's just pusillanimous bleating baloney," he said in a recent interview on "Panorama," a local TV show in Washington. He says the letter—which was sent to news outfits regardless of whether they had any plans to write about him—is an attempt to "assist" the media. By reminding reporters of the Justice Department report, he says, it will promote accuracy and prevent libel suits, which are "as distasteful to journalists as they are for victims."

This is thoughtful of Allen, considering that it costs about \$200 per hour to hire the services of a top Arnold & Porter attorney. But Allen isn't generally known for his charitable impulses toward the press. Earlier this year, in a *USA Today* column titled CONTROL THE MEDIA TO END THEIR ABUSES, Allen likened journalism to street crime. "In simulated gang rape, pack journalists descend on the

homes of their victims. My family and I were virtually held hostage for six weeks during a non-stop stakeout," Allen wrote. "People put themselves at an enormous risk when the media put them in the cross hairs and squeeze the trigger." He urged citizens to fight back by pressing for higher libel judgments.

I learned firsthand about Allen's desire to assist reporters when I called his office to set up an interview. An aide told me to submit my questions in writing. (The explanation was that Allen was too busy to meet me, although it must have taken him longer to write out answers than to answer questions face to face.) After a few days, Allen sent a package to my boss, Martin Peretz, containing his answers and a letter. He said my questions amounted to "sadistic harassment," and hinted broadly that he would sue THE NEW REPUBLIC if he didn't like what I wrote about him. "I'm not trying to pick a fight with THE NEW REPUBLIC, Mr. Peretz," he added, "and I advise THE NEW REPUBLIC not to pick one with me." Later, I managed to get Allen on the telephone, but he again refused to entertain questions unless I put them in writing.

Allen's attempts to get reporters to see things his way are partly due to the fact that he has been burned in the past. Reporters and camera crews camping out at his house to cover the story of his alleged bribe-taking behaved disgracefully. (One reporter accosted Allen's 6-year-old daughter for an interview on the way to school.) And some reporters have given inaccurate shorthand accounts of the events leading up to his resignation. Last March, for example, an ABC News reporter, Jack Smith, said that Allen "set up an interview with Nancy Reagan for a Japanese magazine, but resigned when it turned out he'd accepted \$1,000 for his trouble."

The actual story of Allen's departure from office is a bit more complicated. Late in 1981, it was reported that Allen had accepted three expensive watches from a Japanese

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